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ABSTRACT

This paper treats the Afro-Brazilian fetish cults found throughout Brazil and examines the syncretism of these cults with Catholicism. The religious practices of the "macumbas" (deities of the Afro-Brazilian cults), ritual music, and the ethnicity of the Negroes from both southern and northern Brazil are discussed. Frequently, excerpts of songs and poetry of the various cults are provided and analyzed. (RL)

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HEDRICK—THE AFRO-BRAZILIAN FETISH CULTS

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THE AFRO-BRAZILIAN FETISH CULTS: RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM

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This paper is designed to treat of the Afro-Brazilian fetish cults found spread throughout Brazil, the country that is a half-continent. We shall investigate the syncretism of the Afro-Brazilian cults with Catholicism; we shall look in on religious practices of the *macumbas*; we shall become somewhat familiar with the deities of the Afro-Brazilian cults; we shall delve into the music used in the various rites, and the Negroes of both southern and northern Brazil shall come under consideration.

But first, let us consider the initial question. From whence come these Negroes? Africa—yes; but more specifically, they are of Sudanese, Bantu, Yoruba, Congolese, and other derivations. The influx of *africanos* in Brazil was started, surely, with the institution of slavery. The exact date when African importation was commenced is unknown, although it is thought that the fleet which Martin Alfonso de Souza in 1531 encountered in the bay at Bahia was engaged in the transport of slaves.¹ Sometime later in this same century the slave trade began to increase, with the city of Bahia serving as the main receiving point, according to Pierson.²

How many different African tribes were represented by the tremendous involuntary migration of almost 5,000,000 Negroes³ to Brazil between the beginning of Portuguese colonization and 1850 when further importation of slaves was banned, is not known. In a moment of warped patriotism, Ruy Barbosa, then Minister of the Republic of Brazil, in 1889 ordered the archives on slavery to be burned.

¹Donald Pierson. *Negroes in Brazil*. (Chicago, 1942). p. 31.

²Pierson. *loc. cit.*

³Vera Kelsey. *Seven Keys to Brazil*. (New York, 1940). p. 23.

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Bantus—and this included Angola-Congo tribes—and Sudanese arrived in the greatest number. But the rich colonists of North Brazil imported also Fula-Fulos, Africans that some authorities maintain are not Negroes at all. Tall, with wavy hair, oval faces and clear skins, and in their customs and culture very akin to the whites, they came as “friends, mistresses and housekeepers”⁴ for the womanless Portuguese. And the rich miners of Minas Geraes, had among their slaves at least one Negress from Mina of “delicate features, relative beauty and, besides, healthy, intelligent and affectionate.”⁵ For work in the sugar fields and mines, and for all purposes in less affluent colonies like Rio de Janeiro, esthetic values were sacrificed to secure as much strength and endurance as possible in low-priced slaves of many less-advanced tribes.

Of the three basic peoples in colonial Brazil, the Negroes were best fitted for life there. They were tropics-bred, and they were experienced in agriculture (primitive though it may have been), and in pastoral industries. By nature, they were adaptable, expansive, happy, and resourceful, according to Kelsey.⁶ Best of all, for the Portuguese colonists, they were a cooperative people as a whole, trained through centuries of family, village and tribal life in sharing communal lands and labors. The Indian was by nature an individualist, a *grande senhor*, and the Portuguese acquired this attitude through the right of conquest.

The Negro has influenced the national life of Brazil, and particularly the religion. There are evidently two main reasons why the Negro has made (at least on the surface) no great contribution to society in Brazil. The following passage adequately expresses the thought.

“... the distinction made in the United States between white and black. Out of suppression and restriction—unjust though they are—welled the great Negro music, the spirit that could create a Paul Robeson or Marian Anderson. The other is the lack of competition in Brazil between white man and black—the lack of competition in general. A factor in this was the law passed by the Republic in 1889 forbidding any distinction of race or color to be made in the census or in any other way.

There are no Paul Robesons, W.E.B. Dubois, ... in Brazil today. If there were, they would be recognized not as outstanding exponents of the Negro race, but as outstanding Brazilians.”⁷

⁴*Ibid.* p. 24.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.* pp. 25-26.

In Brazil, the Negroes, with their Mohammedan beliefs (later to be discussed), reinforced the twist that Catholicism had already received from the *moros* in Portugal. By identifying their own pagan deities with the God, Christ, Virgin and saints of the Catholic ritual and their tribal clans with the Brotherhoods, they further modified or enriched it. And cults—*macumbas* in Rio, *candomblés* in Bahia, *catimbos* in Pernambuco—flourish both secretly and openly.

"It is the history of religion that when a weaker cult meets a stronger, it does not disappear."⁸ If its gods are not identified with the stronger gods or god, they are demoted to the roles of heroes or helpful spirits, or still lower, to the class of evil spirits, or demons. Religious concepts, under persecution, suppressed and hidden, emerge again as superstitions. A little of everything happened to the religious beliefs of Africa transported with the slaves to Brazil.

Already colored with Mohammedanism, Judaism and Catholicism (through Portuguese missionaries in Africa), and in Brazil meeting Catholicism, spiritism and Indian beliefs, their cults were irrevocably altered and mixed. The Sudanese—and other African tribes to a lesser degree—brought a well-developed mythology with them. Their Lord of the Heavens, Master of the Sky, was Olorun. A Being without form, remaining forever on his African "Olympus", he was only manifested through secondary gods or *orixás*.

Obatala, the Sky, and Odudua, the Earth, chief of these *orixás*, marrying became the parents of Aganju, Land, and Yemanja, Water. And the Land and Water, also had one son, Orungan. Like Oedipus, Orungan became impassioned with his mother. One day when his father was absent he tried to violate her. She fled, and as he was about to overtake her, fell to the ground, dead. Immediately her body began to swell; from her breasts flowed two rivers that formed a great lake, and from her womb appeared fifteen gods. Among these were Xango, God of Thunder, and Ogun, God of War and Iron.⁹

In Brazil, when baptized en masse into the Catholic Faith, the Sudanese made some logical identifications. In God, whom the early Christians, for the benefit of simple minds had represented concretely as much like Zeus or Jupiter—an old man with a beard complete with a frown and thunderous voice—they recognized Olorun. In Christ, a very material, real Christ, they saw Obatala, or more concretely, Nosso Senhor do Bom Fim ("Our Lord of the Good End.")

Odudua, like Sant'Anna, mother of the Virgin Mary, was relegated to a secondary place, and Yemanja became Nossa Senhora do

⁸*Ibid.* p. 25.

⁹Pierson. *op cit. passim.*

Rosario in Bahia, or Nossa Senhora de Conceição in Rio. In Rio, Xango became St. Michael; Ogun, sometimes St. Anthony, sometimes St. George. And Exu and Leba, two evil Sudanese deities, were identified with Satan.

With these and other similar adjustments, the Negroes during colonial times were able to appear to their white masters to be dutifully following the Catholic teachings, while in reality they continued to worship their own gods. Now the two beliefs are completely merged, and few Negroes remember the early identifications. Similarly, meeting there the Indian deities, Sereia do Mar, Queen of the Sea, and Caboclinho dos Mattos, God of the Hunt, the Negroes identified them with Yemanjá and Oxossi, their African counterparts.

Xango, a powerful god in Africa, is still the most important of the ancient African gods in Brazil, and is worshipped in the macumbas of Rio de Janeiro and the candomblés of Bahia. His fetish is the meteor ("Stone of Lightning"); his colors are red and white. Originally, his powers of destruction made him feared, but now, says Arthur Ramos, he has become a heroic figure—the Siegfried of Brazilian macumbas. He is both the god of the cult and the name of the centers where his fetishistic ceremonies are held.

With reference to the Bantu cults to be found in Brazil, we shall turn to the description given by T. Lynn Smith, in his book *Brazil: People and Institutions*, which gives an excellent summary of this tribe's status in Brazil. He states:

"The many influences which the Negroes of the Bantu groups have had upon the language of Brazil are well known, but only recently has their importance as carriers of religious culture come to light. Nina Rodrigues neglected this important aspect of the study to which he gave a large part of his life, and only with the investigations of Ramos and his collaborators has a beginning been made in ascertaining survivals of Bantu religious culture in Brazil. The macumbas of Rio de Janeiro and Niterói are those which have yielded the most results in this field."¹⁰

The Bantus did not have the highly developed fetish cults, at least nothing to compare with the Sudanese, but nevertheless, they brought along with them to Brazil a cult of the dead, deities of the household, ancestor worship, supernatural beings (both friendly and unfriendly); they also believed in the transmigration of the soul, totemism, and other fetish practices closely related to spiritualism.

¹⁰T. Lynn Smith. *Brazil: People and Institutions*. (Baton Rouge, 1954). p. 600.

Doctor Smith goes on to say that "according to Ramos,

the liturgy of the Bantu cults is closely linked with funeral rites, totemic ceremonies, and magical medicine. The high priest is called *quimbanda*, and is a combination of sacerdote, doctor, fortune-teller, and sorcerer. But 'among the Afro-Brazilians of Bantu origin, the religious liturgy proper is exceedingly poor and has been almost completely absorbed by that of *gêge-nagô*.' Thus the *quimbanda* of Rio de Janeiro has lost much of the prestige of the office. He serves only in the function of head of the *macumba*, aided by an assistant who is called a *cambône*. Under the influence of the *gêge-nagô* religion the priest is referred to as *pai de santo* and the initiates as *filhos de santo*, although in some *macumbas* the latter are called "mediums" because of spiritualistic influences. These *macumbas* of Bantu origin also have functionaries called *sambas* whose duties are to receive the visitors and to care for the women who receive the saint."¹¹

All of these cults, whether they be of Sudanese or Bantu or Yoruba derivation have a double importance in Brazil. Through a network of these centers all over the country, they involve a large number of Negroes, *mestizos* and even whites in their worship. Their dances and music have for long influenced the arts of Brazil. It is impossible, in writing on religion in Brazil, to leave out at least a mention of the music found there. As Ramos puts it:

"Entre os povos primitivos, todos os grandes atos da sua vida são acompanhados de mímica exuberante, o que constitui um passo para a dança ritual."¹²

The dance, and music in general, plays a large part in any Afro-Brazilian cult, as can be seen from the trance-like state into which the people often dance themselves, e.g., while the *adarrum* cadence of the drum (*atabaque*) is played. In Brazil, it would appear that the Africanos brought a dance to fit virtually any situation.

"Entre os povos negros que forneceram escravos para a América, a dança era uma instituição; nos autos de caça, de guerra, danças sexuais' (ritos

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Arthur Ramos. *ONegro Brasileiro* (Sao Paulo, 1951). p. 192.

de circuncisão, puberdade, casamento, etc.),
danças funerárias, danças religiosas. . ."¹³

The Sudanese and Bantus seem to have brought most of the music which has evolved into some of our modern dances, e.g., the *quizomba* which was brought from Africa to Brazil, was converted into the *samba* and *batuque*, the former spreading to the United States. The *Conga* also comes from Brazil, which originally got it from the Africanos, and so on.

There are many musical instruments which could be discussed, which are of Negro origin, and to a varying degree play some part in the Afro-Brazilian cult worship. Luciano Gallet lists twenty-five instruments of Negro origin, and I herein quote him: "atabaque, adufe, birimbau, agogô, carimbó, caxambu, cucumbi, chocalho, fungador, ganzá or canzá, gongon, mulungu, marimba, puita, piano de cuia, pandeiro, quissange, roncadôr, pererenga, socadôr, tambor or tambu, ubatá, vuvú or vú, xequeê or xequedê, triângulo."¹⁴

The songs of the different macumbas are many times used to glorify their gods. Often, in the songs is seen a syncretism of different religious groups, and often a confusion of the attributes of different gods. The following page, set apart from the text, contains the lyrics of just a sampling of the myriads of songs used in various worships.

A macumba ceremony can be compared in general with a voodoo session in the southern part of the United States. Each center (*terreiro*) or meeting place, consisting usually of an inner and outer sanctum, is presided over by a *pae* or *mae de santo* or both. In addition to communicating with the spirits or deities and passing on their wishes to the mortals, they act as counselors on economic and love affairs for unfortunate and unhappy members.

According to Ramos, the following song illustrates the assimilation of the *santos* of the *caboclo*. *Yemanjá* is converted to the *Sereia do mar*, *Rainha do mar* (also syncretism with the *Calunga* of the Angola cults, D. Janáina, or D. Maria, etc.

Rainha do mar
Oh! Sereia do mar
Sereia, sereia
Oh! Sereia do mar
Viva a mãe d'água
Viva a Sereia

¹³*Ibid.* p. 193.

¹⁴*Ibid.* p. 209.

Viva os cabocos da aldeia
D. Janaína me de licença
Pra brincar no vosso reinado

Another example of the lyrics of a song is the following, which also sees some confusion, in that Oxóssi is confused with the *caboclo do mato* (hunter).

Caça no canlenda
Vula ê vula ô
Caça no canlenda
Vula ê tatumanzou

Caça, caça, caçador
Eu gostei de ver caçar
Olhe veado no mato corredor
Cadê oxóssi caçador.

Note: After Ramos' *O Negro Brasileiro*, p. 141-142.

Each member is consecrated for life to the spirit or deity which during his or (chiefly) her initiation manifests itself in her through a species of "possession". She thus becomes a daughter of the spirit (*filha de santo*) and also the instrument through which it manifests itself—the horse of the spirit (*cavalho*). Although the impulse to "mount to the head" of its "horse" may seize a spirit outside a macumba session—may even go so far as to cause its steed to run wildly through forests, returning covered with leaves or nettles, to climb trees or swallow live coals—such cases are rare today. The "possession" is customarily achieved during a macumba and then only after the daughter, in a hallucinating fetishistic dance has reached such a "state of spirit" that, willy-nilly, it must put in an appearance.

Such seizures can range from simple spells of swooning—more or less a state of trance—to the most violent manifestations. The daughter is then carried into the inner sanctum, where she receives the insignia of her particular spirit or deity, and, revived, returns to the outer sanctum to receive all the respect due one whom a deity has so honored. (The writer does not attempt to discern whether the more violent "manifestations" are *bona fide* or not, but being somewhat familiar with the voodoo practices in the United States, he tends to doubt the verisimilitude of all of the facets of a seizure).

A special, rhythmic beat on the drum is used to call each spirit, but if it delays unnecessarily, more urgent themes are employed. As previously mentioned, for difficult cases, there is the *toque adarrum*, a swift, strong, continuous rhythm that, it is said, no spirit on earth can resist.

Each terreiro has its own way of staging a macumba ceremony, but a description of one (in this case quite freely translated and simplified) included in *Viagem Maravilhosa*, by Graca Aranha, contains all the elements. This account is to be found on page 27 of Kelsey's book, *Seven Keys to Brazil*.

"The *mae de santo* rose and entered the circle. She danced superbly. Head erect, her long body shaking, she moved lightly, airily. The *macumbeiros* (members) clapped their hands to the beat of the drums; samba'd continuously. The music grew louder. The sour Negro odor filled the air. . . She increased her efforts. Her transparent chemise clung to her oily thighs; abdomen, hips showing black through the whiteness of the cambric. She continued to dance with concentration, fervor. The devotees beat their heavy hands, their heavy heads. And the shrill, high voices of the women soared above the deep, rough voices of the men. Excited with voluptuousness and devotion, they danced with frenzied shouts, the *pãe de santo* encouraging them with pious laments. Amelia tore off her chemise. Delirium! The tall Negress lifted her head, her breasts; her abdomen thrust forward, her hips stiffened. . . Eh! Macumba! Other Negresses stripped themselves, thin, tall, fat. . . . They jerked and rolled in the arms of hallucinated men. One shrieked, leaped, tried to bite, and fell, convulsed, in spasms, beating on the ground. "Possessed" she lay, kicking continuously at the feet of the *pãe de santo* while men and women danced frantically about her. . . ."15

Although there are many foreigners who visit the various macumbas, such scenes are not to be viewed as amusement. If the expression is possible, the dance is a form of physical psychoanalysis through which a tortured soul and body find relief. Nina Rodrigues wrote that it is necessary

"to have witnessed these gestures and contortions of disordered and violent movements. . . in these sacred dances for hours on end, during days and nights. . . to have seen the dancers drowned in sweat which the hand of some companion wipes away with napkin or towel. . . yet dancing, dancing always, to understand the purpose behind

¹⁵Kelsey. *op. cit.* p. 27.

this exhausting effort and why, instead of abating, it steadily grows more intense. It is a species of increasing fury, of rage, of despair, constantly more accentuated. . . to the accompaniment of the varied cadences of drums—until the final manifestation of the spirit."¹⁶

We shall now move from the general to the more specific areas of this paper. This first facet which I wish to discuss is the syncretism of African gods and Catholic saints in Brazilian Afro-Brazilian cults.

The tendency of native peoples who have long had contact with Catholicism to achieve a syncretism between their aboriginal religious beliefs and the doctrines and rituals of the Church has received notice in the case of various folk. In Brazil, specific identifications are made between African gods and Catholic saints. The information for the following listing has been gathered from various authorities, e.g., Ramos, *O Negro Brasileiro*; Herskovits, "New World Negro Belief"; Rodrigues, *O Animismo Fetichista dos Negros Bahianos*, etc.

Next, let us take a passing look at the different ethnic groups. According to the studies of Arthur Ramos, Fernando Ortiz, Melville Herskovits and others, the influence of the African peoples made itself felt in the New World in the following manner:

- 1) Fanti-ashanti, en la región sudoriental de Estados Unidos, en las Antillas Menores británicas, y en la Guayana. En Haití y en Bahía, Brasil, los fantiashanti ocuparon el tercer lugar.
- 2) Ewe en el antiguo territorio francés de Louisiana, en Haití, en las Antillas Menores francesas. En la Guayana y en Bahía, Brasil, los Ewe ocuparon el segundo lugar.
- 3) Yoruba en la región occidental de Cuba y en la zona de Bahía, en Brasil. . . .
- 4) Sudanes en México, durante el siglo XVI. El sudanés ocupa. . . el cuarto lugar (i.e., in Brazil).
- 5) Bantú en las regiones del noroeste y sureste del Brasil. . .¹⁷

Of the groups mentioned, the Sudanese Negro is the one who primarily introduced Mohammedanism into the Afro-Brazilian cult picture. Of the millions of Negroes in Brazil, many had inevitably

¹⁶Quoted in Kelsey. *op. cit.* p. 28-29.

¹⁷Arthur Ramos. *Las Culturas Negras en el Nuevo Mundo*. Tr. Ernestina de champourcin. (Mexico, 1943). p. 356.

come into contact with the Arabic culture and consequently the Mohammedan religion.

"During the early years of the XIX century, these Negroes, greatly aided by their knowledge of the Arabic tongue and ability to communicate by writing, organized some of the greatest slave revolts that Brazil ever knew."¹⁸

Due to these revolts, much, if not most of the Mohammedan influence was eradicated by the government. However, the Moslem influence is still seen in the religions of Afro-Brazilian nature, especially in the gêge-nagô and Bantu cults. The original Arabic word "alufa" is still used to designate the priest who uses "lines" in the language. "The ritual has undergone much syncretism, being combined with Indian as well as other African religious traits."¹⁹

Arthur Ramos has summed it up very neatly in his book *Las Culturas Negras en el Nuevo Mundo*.

"Los negros islamizados conservaron en el Brasil varias instituciones culturales, que poco a poco fueron desapareciendo debido al aislamiento en que se acantonaron. En Bahía vivían separados unos de otros. Tenían costumbres austeras y dentro de sus casas procuraban observar lo más estrictamente posible los preceptos del Corán. La ladera del Taboao a lo largo del Pelourinho, la ladera de Alvo, etc., en Bahía, fueron durante mucho tiempo reductos de los negros *haussás* islamizados. Los negros *malês* conservaban dentro de sus casas la indumentaria del Sudán mahometano: la túnica blanca (*abadá* o *camison*) el gorro (*filá*), de donde pendía una larga faja blanca. Los sacerdotes (*lemanos* y *alufás*) llevaban también el *tecebá* ya citado. Las mujeres usaban turbantes (*rodetes*) y vistosas telas de la Costa, sayas con randas, chinelas, etc., indumentaria asociada con otras tradiciones de la Costa de los Esclavos y que pasaron a caracterizar el tipo de la 'bahiana'.

Esos negros conservaron en Bahía las costumbres y tradiciones del Sudán islamizado. Además de las prácticas del culto ya descritas,

¹⁸Smith. *op. cit.* p. 599.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

celebraban la *circuncisión* o *Kola*, que sufrían a los diez años. No podían hacer su viaje a la Meca. Pero no olvidaban la época del *assumy* o ayuno anual. La fiesta del *assumy* coincidía con la de Pentecostes de los católicos y duraba toda una luna. Durante ese período se observaba con rigor et tabú alimenticio: solo podían comer *ñame* cocido con aceite de *dendê*, arroz molido con agua y azúcar o leche y miel de abejas. . . . En ciertas formas de saludo los negros bahianos conservan aún expresiones usadas por los *malês*. . . . Creo que ya no existe hoy el culto. . . . organizado. Y menos aún otras tradiciones . . . de las que sólo quedan pequeñas supervivencias.”²⁰

This writer is certainly not one to dispute the word of Ramos, *prima facie*, consequently, it must be concluded that the study of Negro-Muslemism is today a page of history in Brazil, excepting for certain remnants in macumba services and in everyday greetings still used by the *malê* peoples.

We shall now explore the candomblé and macumba of two different areas, Porto Alegre in the south and Bahia, in the north. This is not an indication that there are not important outposts of Afro-Brazilian cults in other areas or cities. These two cities have been chosen for discussion due to the fact that they are relatively important in the cult mosaic of Brazil, and due to the availability of pertinent material. The first city, Porto Alegre, is the capital of the State of Rio Grande do Sul. The writer has not been able to find concrete census figures concerning the numerical strength of the various ethnical groups in Porto Alegre (nor in Bahia for that matter), since no questions bearing on racial affiliation are included in the Brazilian census tract. However, some estimates made by persons who are intimately acquainted with the city shall be listed, which indicate that there is a Negro population quite adequate to provide the numerical base for the preservation and maintenance of African customs there. The estimates given are drawn from Herskovits, "The Southernmost Outposts of New World Africanisms". These estimates agree that the Negroes (in Porto Alegre) form between fifteen per-cent and twenty per-cent of the total population; which, if even the lesser figure is accepted, means that the city must have more than 50,000 persons of predominantly African ancestry.

As is true elsewhere in Brazil, cult-life in Porto Alegre centers about the cult-house, the residence of the priest or priestess who

²⁰Ramos. *Las Culturas Negras*. . . . p. 282-288, *passim*.

heads the macumba. Here the shrines of the gods are installed, and here the cult rituals are carried on. The word used by cult members to designate these centers and their rituals is *pará*, though *batuque*, employed by outsiders is often encountered. (See the book by Ramos, *O Negro Brasileiro*, pp. 169-174, in which a description of a *batuque* is given). These terms are the equivalents of the macumba of Rio, the candomble of Bahia, and xango of Pernambuco. Certain of these centers are of considerable age; some of them have traditions going back three or four generations, evidenced by the ability of their heads to tell those who preceded and trained them, according to Herskovits.²¹ According also to Herskovits, the shrines are less elaborate in the *pará* of Porto Alegre than are those of the North. In both areas the objects sacred to the gods are covered with cloths of appropriate colors, vessels filled with water sacred to the spirit stand before the altars, while food offerings of various kinds are on the floor.

Most sacred on any altar is the stone dedicated to the god. Here, as elsewhere, the stone is the seat of power, the sacred object to which the spirit comes. The attitude toward these stones expressed by one priestess (to Herskovits) was affection and pride as well as respect. According to Herskovits, the number of priests and priestesses could not be ascertained, but the impression that he gives is that the women far outnumber the men in this field. He tells of the dress of one priest in particular which is of great interest. Priestesses are also mentioned.

"One priest was encountered immediately after he had concluded a divining session. He wore a colored sash about his waist, a small round cap in the color of his god, Shapana, was atop his head, and his long, varicolored strands of beads went over one shoulder and under the opposite arm. The priestesses visited in their homes wore nothing distinctive. Except that the prevailing colors of their dresses were those of their principal gods, no one unaccustomed to associating colors and deities would realize that there was anything of cult significance in their dress."²²

All priests and priestesses, however, do wear the beads of the *santo* to which they are dedicated; under their clothing they carry *figas*, medieval charms widely used by Afro-Brazilians against the evil eye, carved in the shape of a clenched fist. According to Dr. T. Lynn

²¹Melville Herskovits. "Southernmost Outposts of New World Africanisms." *American Anthropologist*. N.S. Vol. 45 (Menasha, Wis.: 1943). p. 498.

²²*Ibid.* p. 500.

Smith²³, both beads and figas are to be purchased in the public markets of Brazil.

Divination is an important function of the head of the cult. The divining session generally takes place in the outer-sanctum of the pará, or in an appropriate place to the liking of the priest. The *kpele*, or chain of shells is used to foretell the future and to reveal the wishes of the gods. This custom may be compared to the old European custom of stone-divination. Techniques of divination vary, the throwing of cowry shells and water gazing being examples thereof.

The priests and priestesses of Porto Alegre admit that they have trouble in carrying out the functions of their religion at times, but rather than move their center of operation, they seem to be willing to be shoved around a bit, be stared at by the ever-increasing number of tourists (although not in their real, intense religious activities), who are always willing to drop a few cents or dollars for the privilege of witnessing "something different". For anyone interested in a more intense study of this area of Afro-Brazilian cultism, the article by Herskovits (*op. cit.*, *passim.*) is well worth the reading.

Let us now move northward to Bahia, the stronghold of cultism in this part of Brazil. Bahia lies on the coast of Brazil, and is the capital of the state of Bahia — the city also known under the name of Salvador until quite recently, and still used to an extent today.

In Bahia, the candomblé, the Afro-Brazilian fetish cult center, is still a vigorous institution—attracting primarily the people of the lower classes. Some *seitas*, i.e., cult centers, have maintained the same temple worship for generations. Their rituals and ceremonies are serious, dignified, and carried on according to definite, fixed rules.

This highly complex organization of ritual and belief is built around an order or *orixás*, or pantheon of deities, each of whom apparently personifies some natural phenomenon. Thus, of the more important and more widely honored deities, Xangô is worshipped as the orixá of lightning and thunder; Ogun, war and iron; Oxossi, the hunt; Omolu, pestilence; Nanan, rain; Yemanjá, salt water; Oxun, fresh water; Yansan, wind and storm; Oxun-manrê, rainbow; and Beji, twin births.

The older and more respected *seitas* are commonly considered to be of Nagô (Yoruba) or Gêge (Ewe) origin, according to Pierson.²⁴ They represent a fusion in Brazil of these two related bodies of African ritual and belief.

²³Told to this writer by Dr. T. Lynn Smith at the home of same.

²⁴Pierson. *op. cit.* p. 275.

At this point, it is deemed necessary to point out that in the area of Bahia, in particular, there is a group known as the *caboclo candomblé*, an abortive attempt at Afro-Brazilian macumba ceremony. These candomblés carry on their ceremonies principally in Portuguese, rather than in Bantu, or Sudanese dialects. They do add certain phases of African origin, much corrupted through misuse, which they have picked up from the Gêge-Nagô or Congo-Angola seitas, and throw in a few words of Tupi for good measure. The borrowing of certain elements on the part of the apers is resented to a great extent by the orthodox *africanos*. According to one Negro, quoted in Pierson's book: "Si seja mistura, e bobagem." (If it's mixed, it's nonsense.") Pierson goes on to quote a leader of a cult who once burst out:

"This fellow João da Pedra Preta! What a disgraceful whelp! His forebears, what did they know? Were they brought up in the *seita*, and did they 'deixaram o cargo' to him? No! He came here from the *sertão* and started a *candomblé*. Picked up a little Gêge, a little Nagô, a little Congo, a little Indian stuff, and so on. A disgraceful mixture!"²⁵

Thus it can be seen that these people are no raving, savage, perhaps aboriginal beings — they defend their faith, and take it quite seriously — especially when confronted with interlopers like the aforementioned João da Pedra Preta.

The sacred places of this group are the *terreiro*, the temple or temple grounds; the *franquia*, or sacred groves; and certain sacred springs; sacred lakes; sacred arms of the sea, etc. In the *terreiro* are to be found the *barracão*, the sacred dance pavilion; the *pegi*, the fetish sanctuary; the *camarinha*, a type of sacred room in which the initiates of the religion are interned during the period of their preparation; special huts for certain orixás, like Sxú "who prefer to dwell outside the *pegi*"; and the living quarters of the priest and his immediate assemblage.

According to Pierson:

"Each *seita* is presided over by a priest or priestess known as the *pãe de santo* or *mãe de santo* (literally, the 'father' or 'mother' of the *orixás*). His (or her) most important functions are to identify a 'manifesting' deity, supervise the initiation of the ceremonial dancers in whom an initial 'manifestation' has occurred, perform the sacred

²⁵*Ibid.* p. 276.

ritual designed to 'fix' the *orixá* in the fetish, supervise the sacrifices, and preside at public ceremonies. He may also exercise, to some extent at least, the office of an *olhador*, or diviner, who 'throws the Ifá' to determine in advance the outcome of some projected action; and also the office of a *curandeiro*, who diagnoses ailments and prescribes cures. He may minister to a clientele even outside the members of the *seita*, giving advice and counsel on matters of business, politics, love etc."²⁶

The *pãe* or *mãe de santo* at times deal in black magic, acting as a *feiticeiro*. However, this occupation is not well looked upon by some of the more prominent priests or priestesses, who refuse to permit (if possible) deeds which are aimed at the injury of their fellow-men. However, in various readings, it appears to this writer that the *caboclo seitas* often indulge in witch-craft and the black arts. This I cannot prove, nor have I found any book to date which deals exclusively, or even extensively with this matter.

We have spoken previously of the "visitation" or manifestation of the *orixá* in the bodies of his adherents. The visitation is known in Brazilian cults as the *estado de santo* ("state of the saint") and is ordinarily produced due to a number of reasons. One is fasting; another, the use of herbs (the inhalation of their fumes while being burned); the monotonous drone of the drums; the heat of the bodies; fatigue; expectation; perhaps noise—this writer wonders if Freud might not also discover a reason for "manifestations" in these meetings. Pierson points out that, strangely enough / ? /, "seizure is said to be avoidable by drinking cold water."²⁷

Gestures also play a part in the religious life of the *candomblés*. When saluting a high dignitary of the cult, a *filha de santo*, if the *orixá* to whom she is vowed is masculine, prostrates herself, face downward at the feet of the one so honored; if her *orixá* is feminine, she lies at full length first on one side then the other, and, on arising, touches her head to the ground. A veritable calisthenic workout! In taking leave of an *orixá* who has "visited" the ceremony, a member of the *seita* clasps the left hand of the dancer very tightly. *Ogans* (high ranking *macumbeiros*) have a special handshake all their own for meeting occasions. Following a discussion among members of a *seita*, agreement is signified by rising, beating the palms, and shaking hands.

²⁶*Ibid.* p. 281.

²⁷*Ibid.* p. 286.

If it were at all possible for us to visit a *candomblé*, the following ceremony, described by Pierson, might well greet our eyes and ears.

"Every dance begins with the salutation of the *mãe de santo*, which is accomplished by striking decisively the *agôô*. Immediately the drums take up the rhythm. The *filhas* begin to dance, they circle turning like the rim of a wheel, counter-clockwise. The women have their hands clasped behind their backs, their shoulders are hunching backward and forward, their bodies bending at the waist from side to side. One of the *Oxun* initiates moves with a halting, jerking movement, then suddenly pivots a complete turn. All the dancers are singing a refrain which sounds like, 'Ô-mî-á, bá-tu-lê.' After some twenty minutes of continuous dancing, one of the *filhas* suddenly becomes 'possessed', her eyes close, her expression becomes listless, while her neck and shoulder muscles work convulsively back and forth 'in time to the music'. Voluntary control is apparently gone, and she is helped around the circle by the next in line. When the music temporarily ceases she relaxes, staggers, and appears in imminent danger of falling. Several *filhas* rush to catch and support her.

As in the *mãe de santo* strikes the *agôô*, the leader of the drummers takes up the rhythm and sings out a refrain in which all the dancers join, beating their palms in time with the music. The tempo increases, the dancers as they pass round the circle alternately bow their heads, flex their knees, and touch the right hand to the floor, then snap erect, all in perfect time with the music. An elderly black woman emerges from a connecting room and, shaking vigorously a *caxixi*, joins the dance. The loud reports, rockets go off outside the *barracao*. Popcorn is then brought in and thrown over the dancers. The eyes of the initiates, who have also made part of the circle of dancers, are closed and remain closed throughout the ceremony. The shoulders of one *yauô* jerk spasmodically, her head hangs limp and must be supported by other dancers. . . .²⁸

²⁸*Ibid.* pp. 302-303.

There may ensue mock fights (while dancing), the dancing may even turn into orgy. The dance continues, rockets, *et al.*, until, through the persuasion of the *adarrum* (perhaps, if necessary) the orixá finally makes his presence known through the "possession" of their human intermediaries.

As a whole, the cult life of the Bahian Negroes is far and above in a generally better condition physically and morally, than that of, for example, the Negroes of Rio de Janeiro. The Bahian cults are generally rather wholesome, with the exception of a few caboclo seitas, where unwholesome tendencies have crept in.

The Catholic Church, especially in this area, has shown great patience, and has managed to incorporate most of the Bahian fetish cults into its fold. The leaders of the cults may even be seen in attendance at mass these days! Many times they will bring their entire following and participate in some function of the Church. Thus,

"each year at an appointed time, mãe de santo Anninha takes her filhas de santo, dressed in their *bahiana* costumes, and her ogans, and attends Mass in Bomfim Church; as similarly does the *vazovyo mãe de santo*, Sabina, in the *igreja of Santo Antonio da Barra*. Anninha, like certain other cult officials, is a member of a Catholic order. So far has the identification of many elements of the fetish tradition with Catholic ideology and practice now gone that to the simple minds of cults members there is little distinction between them. The *pãe de santo* of a prominent Congo seita recently remarked, 'I do everything (i.e., I carry on all cult rituals and ceremonies) in the name of the church.'²⁹

It is interesting to note, however, that nowhere would one be apt to find that the Church itself would condone the point of view set forth by the *pãe de santo* in the immediate past quotation. The actual syncretic movement in Brazil can be listed very neatly in the following manner:

"At first the African cults tended to amalgamate one with the other. Later the process of acculturation widened to the Indian, and finally to the religions introduced by the whites, Catholicism and spiritualism. According to this noted author-

²⁹*Ibid.* pp. 305-306.

ity (Ramos) there is the following ascending order of syncretism

1. Gêge-Nagô
2. Gêge-Nagô-Mussulman
3. Gêge-Nagô-Bantu
4. Gêge-Nagô-Mussulman-Bantu
5. Gêge-Nagô-Mussulman-Bantu-Caboclo
6. Gêge-Nagô-Mussulman-Bantu-Caboclo-Spiritualist
7. (sic) Gêge-Nagô-Mussulman-Bantu-Caboclo-Spiritualist-Catholic

Ramos maintains that it is the last type which prevails among Brazil's backward classes, be they Negro, mixed bloods or whites. It predominates 'in all parts of Brazil, with more intensity in some places than in others, with predominance of one of the forms over the others; here Yoruba, there Bantu, and in other spots, Caboclo-Amerindo.' It is only necessary to add that in the last few years various theosophical elements, particularly the visible symbols, seem to be eagerly snatched up and incorporated into the already extremely heterogeneous religious complexes."³⁰

To diverge for a moment into books not easily found and which were made available to this writer through the generosity of Dr. T. Lynn Smith, I find it most interesting to detail two excerpts taken from the small volumes by Heraldo Meneses, in which he describes the ritual of a macumba (candomblé) to (1) the god Aimoré (Oxossi: God of the Hunt) and (2) to Iára ("Mother" of the Water). Following are those excerpts.

"Verificada as primeiras manifestações mediúnicas no filho de fé, é mister submetê-lo a rigoroso exame de saúde, e, sobretudo, das faculdades mentais. Em seguida se fará um interrogatório para saber se o mesmo está disposto a aceitar as rígidas determinações do chefe de terreiro e cumprir todas as exigências do culto.

³⁰Smith. *op. cit.* p. 603.

Isto feito o inciado fará a sua obrigação nas matas com:

Um ponbo franco
Sete palmos de fita verde
Sete palmos de fita amarela
Sete palmos de fita azul
Sete palmos de fita branca

Um bilhete escrito pelo próprio punho pedindo a proteção de Aimoré para o seu desenvolvimento.

Depois caminhará mata à dentro, em completo jejum, antes do sol raiar, dirigendo-se ao Caboclo Aimoré, com estas palavras:

‘Espírito iluminado presides os destinos daqueles que Te procuram, recebe nesta ofrenda o meu juramento de praticar o bem e o amor ao próximo em qualquer emergência’.

Depois de soltar o pombo deverá atirar-se ao chão batendo com a testa por três vezes, acompanhado da seguinte saudação:

“Salve, Aimoré! Salve a tua falange, salve todo povo da mata! . . .”³¹

Thus we have looked in on a bit of the initiation ceremony of a macumba (candomblé) dedicating one to the god, Aimoré, god of the Hunt (Oxossi).

Let us now turn for a brief survey of an initiation ceremony of a candomblé, in which an adorant or believer is dedicated to the goddess Iara, goddess of the Sea.

“O adorador, ou o crente, que se submete conscientemente às rígidas determinações do Chefe de Terreiro, verificadas as primeiras manifestações de mediunidade, deverá fazer a sua primeira penitência que constará do seguinte:

Um ramilhete com sete rosas brancas
Sete palmos de fita azul
Uma cochinha do mar
Um punhado de sal grosso
Um bilhete escrito pelo próprio punho pedindo proteção para o seu desenvolvimento

³¹Heraldo Meneses. *Aimore (Oxossi)*. (Rio de Janeiro, n.d.). p. 13.

Isto feito, o iniciado levará à praia em dia de sol, até o meio dia, em completo jejum, onde oferecerá à Cabocla Iára prometendo a sua fiel adoração e o acatamento às ordens dos guias e do chefe principal do terreiro.

Nunca um filho de fé poderá servir-se das águas do mar, sob qualquer pretexto, seja pelo banho, viagem longa ou curta, pescarias, etc., sem a devida saudação que será feito com as seguintes palavras:

'Salve Iára, salve a sua falange.' ”³²

In this brief excerpt, we have seen another of the characteristic ceremonies of a candomblé.

It has been attempted to show that there has been a tendency for the cults to degenerate, and to grow farther and farther from their African origins (viz.: the Caboclo seitas, Afro-Catholicism, etc.). Whether this tendency will continue, is of course somewhat a matter of conjecture, but taking into account the already prevalent degeneracy, and the fact that the pure Negro (unadulterated Africanos) is diminishing more and more as the years pass; their religion is consequently becoming more and more bastardized, and must eventually, in this writer's opinion, melt into a hodgepodge of mixed cultistic-Catholicism. Perhaps it will one day be, when Brazil is more fully settled, more industrialized, more "Americanized"; when the sertões will have disappeared, when the African element in Brazil will have been thoroughly acculturated and assimilated, when education will have been instilled throughout the entire land; perhaps then the Afro-Brazilian cults will be no more. Perhaps through the work of the Catholics, Protestants and other religions, these people who now owe their nominal allegiance to Olorun, to Oxossi, to the innumerable gods of their pantheon, will all accept in full the teachings of Christianity (or some other equally God-fearing religion). This is to be seen.

³²Meneses. *Iara. (Mãe d'Água)*. (Rio de Janeiro, n.d.). pp. 13-14.

GLOSSARY

- achogun—assistant sacerdote in the Afro-Brazilian cults of gege-nago origin.
- adarrum—a special beat of the drum used in the Afro-Brazilian cults of gege-nago origin; reputed to be particularly effective in inducing the phenomenon of possession.
- alufá—designation for the sacerdote versed in the religious lore of Moham-medan origin which survives in Afro-Brazilian cults.
- aluja—a Brazilian fetish dance of African origin.
- atabaque—a variety of drum used in Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies.
- baba—one of the names used in Rio de Janeiro to designate a sacerdote of the Afro-Brazilian religious cults.
- babalao—one of the names used in Bahia to designate a sacerdote of the Afro-Brazilian religious cults.
- babalorixa—one of the names used in northeastern Brazil to designate a sacerdote of the Afro-Brazilian religious cults.
- baboloxa—one of the names used in Rio de Janeiro to designate a sacerdote of the Afro-Brazilian religious cults.
- batucaeje (batucage)—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- batuque—a Brazilian dance of African origin, and also used as a generalized term for such dances.
- batuque do jare—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- cambone—assistant sacerdote in the macumbas of Rio de Janeiro.
- candomblé—the designation used in Bahia for the Afro-Brazilian religious cult of gege-nago origin. More specifically it refers to a particular terreiro, sacerdote, and group of worshippers.
- candomblezeiro—designation used in Bahia for the sacerdote who operates a terreiro or candomble of gege-nago origin.
- canzá—a percussion instrument of bamboo used by Brazilian Negroes in their religious ceremonies.
- caruru—a dish prepared with herbs, fish, shrimp, and oil of a palm and served to Xango in the candombles of Bahia.
- caterete—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- catimbo—name by which the religious cult of African origin is known in northeastern Brazil, i.e., the northeastern equivalent of the macumba, the candomble, or the Xango.
- caxambu—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- chiba—a Brazilian of African origin.
- coco-de-zambe—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- cuica—a small, cylindrical musical instrument used in Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies.
- dansa to tambor—a Brazilian dance of African origin.

- despacho—a designation for the sacrifice in an Afro-Brazilian fetish cult.
- ebo—the sacrifice or despacho characteristic of Afro-Brazilian fetish cults.
- feita—the initiate of one of the Afro-Brazilian fetish cults is said to be feita, or made, after she has undergone all of the ceremonial preparation and is ready to become the medium through which the orisha expresses itself.
- feiticeiro—sorcerer, conjurer, or magician.
- filha de santo—a female who has undergone long ceremonial preparation and has been consecrated as one of the inner group of devotees in an Afro-Brazilian fetish cult.
- filhos de santo—children of the saint, or specially prepared devotees of the orishas in one of the Afro-Brazilian fetish cults.
- gêge-nagô—an African religion carried to Brazil by Negroes of Sudanese origin.
- gira—a circle, or the arrangement of the participants in one of the ceremonies of the Afro-Brazilian cults of Bantu origin.
- jeguede—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- jongo—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- macumba—name used in Rio de Janeiro to designate an Afro-Brazilian fetish cult. It also applies to a specific terreiro, sacerdote, and group of worshippers.
- macumbeiro—one of the designations used for the sacerdote of the Afro-Brazilian cult of Bantu origin.
- mãe d'agua—supernatural being who lives in the water. The worship of this goddess is an integral part of many of the fetish cults, especially in Bahia. The belief in such a water spirit is widespread in Brazil.
- mãe de santo (also mae de terreiro)—female sacerdote who operates an Afro-Brazilian fetish cult.
- maracatu—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- ogan—a person of high social status who is initiated into one of the Afro-Brazilian cults and serves as a sponsor for the group in its relation with the outside world.
- oke—an exclamation of reverence used in Afro-Brazilian fetish cults.
- orisha—designation used by A. B. Ellis for a divinity of the Yoruban Negroes. The Portuguese equivalent is *orixa*. Each of the orishas is an expression of one of the great forces in nature.
- page—an Indian medicine man.
- pai de santo—sacerdote who operates an Afro-Brazilian fetish cult.
- Pai Joaquim—an old Negro from the African coast whose spirit is said to take possession of worshippers in the macumbas of Rio de Janeiro.
- pegi—holy of holies of an Afro-Brazilian fetish-cult.
- pegi-gan—name applied to the sacerdote when he is officiating before the altar in one of the Afro-Brazilian fetish cults.

- ponto—a song dedicated to one of the divinities of an Afro-Brazilian fetish cult.
- quimbanda—designation for the chief sacerdote of the macumba in Rio de Janeiro.
- quimbete—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- samba—a Brazilian dance of African origin; also used to designate a functionary in the macumba who has the duties of receiving the visitors and caring for the women who “receive the spirit.”
- sarambeque—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- sarambu—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- scrongo—a Brazilian dance of African origin.
- terreiro—the temple or church of one of the Afro-Brazilian fetish cults.
- Velho Lourenco—an old Negro from the African coast whose spirit is said to take possession of worshippers in the macumbas of Rio de Janeiro.
- yara—an Amazonian designation for the water goddess or mae d’agua.
- Yauô—name for the girl who has been initiated into a candomble in Bahia. She is considered to be the youngest wife of the saint.
- Zumbi—the Brazilian equivalent of the Haitian Zombie; malevolent spirit that roams about at night.

Note: The name of many of the individual gods or goddesses are to be found in a separate list following this glossary. Also note that the sign: () is intended to be a carat.

African deities as found in:

Obatala; Orisala; Orixala
(Oxala)

Grande Mambo
Batala
Shango

Exú (Exu) Essu(?)

Ogun

Osum

Yemanjá

Saponam

Osa-Ose (Oxossi)

Olou; Omolu

Ibeji

Loco

Ifá

Yansan (wife of Shango)

Corresponding saint (s)

“Nosso Senhor de Bomfim”
at Bahia; Saint Anne;
“Senhor do Bomfim” at Rio.

Santa Barbara at Bahia;
St. Michael the Archangel
at Rio; St. Jerome (husband
of Santa Barbara) at Bahia.

The Devil

St. George at Rio;
St. Jerome; St. Anthony at Bahia.

Virgin Mary; N.D. de Candeias.

Virgin Mary; N.S. de Rosario at
Bahia; N.D. de Conceicao at Rio.

The Sacred Sacrament

St. George at Bahia; St.
Sebastian at Rio.

St. Bento

Sts. Cosmas and Damien

St. Francisco

The Most Sacred Sacrament

Santa Barbara (wife of St.
Jerome)